

AN  
E S S A Y  
ON

MODERN LUXURY:

Or, An Atttempt to Delineate its

NATURE, CAUSES, and EFFECTS.

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By S. FAWCONER, M. A.

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— Sævior armis  
Luxuria incubuit, victumque ulciscitur orbem.

Juv.



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A N  
E S S A Y  
O N  
MODERN LUXURY.

**M**AN is made up of two distinct parts, a soul and a body: each of which had its respective functions assigned it from the beginning of their formation. The body cannot be always bent to labour, nor the mind be always in its fervours, strained up to a pitch of virtue\*. Our natural strength would be apt to sink under the weight of continual exercise and application. And therefore a wise and good Providence has

B pro-

\* — Lusus animo debent aliquando dari,  
Ad cogitandum melior ut redeat sibi.

Phædr. L. III. F. xiv.

Ex

provided a remedy for this inconvenience in several agreeable objects of relaxation and refreshment: that, when our powers of body and mind are fatigued and exhausted with constant labour and attention, we may be enabled, by a fresh recruit of animal spirits, to discharge the duties belonging to our several stations in life with greater vigour and alacrity.

Now though the several expedients of gratification and delight, as the ordinance of heaven, are natural, properly adapted, and absolutely necessary sometimes, to our relief, yet are they not to be applied without distinction or limitation. It behoves us to be circumspect in the choice, and moderate in the use, of them. And here prudence will be our guide, and temperance our regulator. As it would be an impeachment of our wisdom to engage in such pleasures as are dissolute and licentious, such as interfere with any moral obligation, or leave an ill impression on the mind: so it would argue a want of moderation to be inor-

inordinately fond of those, whose only recommendation is their innocence. For that, which is allowable in itself, may notwithstanding be abused in its use, if we exceed the bounds of moderation, either with regard to the time which we spend in it, or the degree of affection which we bear towards it. Whenever the love and pursuit of pleasure becomes violent and immoderate, it naturally degenerates into luxury.

My present design is to consider this subject more attentively, to delineate its native properties, and fatal consequences, in order to excite some abler pen to point out a timely remedy for this growing evil. But, before I enter into a more minute description of it, it may not be improper just to hint at its probable occasions.

1. It is natural to imagine, that a prosperous and opulent people, flourishing in conquests, and secure from the apprehension of foreign invasions, would indulge themselves in the gratification of all such



pleasureable objects, as affluence enables them to procure, and ease prompts them to enjoy. But late experience convinces us, that even an unsuccessful war, as the last was at its commencement, was not able to damp the spirit of our national luxury, or check the progress of that popular madness, which has now, for some years, raged with unabating fury among the inhabitants of this country.

2. We must therefore endeavour to trace this effect from some other cause, and examine, whether our present luxury may not be owing to the opulence of the state, or, which answers my purpose as well, to the inequality of private fortunes. Generally speaking, the consequence of extensive commerce is exorbitant wealth : and exorbitant wealth naturally produces an attention to pleasureable enjoyments. For they, who have the means of luxury in their hands, seldom deny themselves any gratification, which their circumstances give them the opportunity of indulging. And in some respects



spects it may be right for people of family and fashion to live up to their quality and fortune : as it gives mankind an opinion of their dignity and opulence, and promotes the circulation of the materials of happiness. But here lies the danger : luxury is of that assimilating insinuating nature, that its infection, like a pestilence, runs thro' every order of the community, from the throne to the cottage. And, whether tempted by inborn pride, or seduced by the power of all-prevailing fashion, every impertinent inferior treads on the heels of his betters. This emulation of pomp and parade is not confined to equals in point of rank or fortune, but extends itself to the most distant degrees in both. For want of some salutary restrictions, whoever has as much vanity as money, and one is generally the consequence of the other, has the liberty of being as expensive as he pleases. So that, if the contagion is not general, it is more owing to Providence, Who has denied us the means, than to any merit of our own in checking the inclination.

tion. We are immoderately fond of pleasure: and, in general, know no other bounds to our indulgence than the utmost extent of our money or credit. The danger of bankruptcy, or horrors of a prison, are not sufficient to keep some men out of the snare of this bewitching enchantress. Our superb souls are animated with a spirit of ambition, emulating at random every expensive instance of fashionable folly, and disdaining to be out-done even by those of superiour fortune. Many would rather risque the ruin of themselves and their dependants, than not gratify their vanity of distinguishing themselves in a degree of superiority, or at least an equality with their neighbour. Hence it is that so many make a figure in the eye of the world, and keep up a farce of grandeur without any thing to support it. Like an ignis fatuus, they shine and glitter for a while, and in a moment disappear.

3. Further, it is observable, that luxury generally abounds, in proportion to the populousness of the capital city. It is become

come a fashion for every body to crowd to the metropolis, to spend part of the year in town, for the sake of its pleasures and diversions. In so large and populous a city, the generality of the inhabitants must be entire strangers to each other. And, where the exteriours form our judgment of the man, and appearance in the vulgar eye passes for the only criterion of true worth: every one is ready to assume the marks of a superiour condition, in order to be esteemed more than what he really is. Hence the unwary part of the one sex falls an easy prey to the designing arts of the other, and the incautious trader becomes a dupe to the tricks of sharpers. Tho' the number of inhabitants in any place may be no obstruction to its commerce, our wants increasing by our assembling together, yet will that commerce be too confined. So that, whilst the overgrown citizen is amassing a prodigious fortune\*: the poor manufacturer is starving in the country for

\* If he does not become a bankrupt, by engaging in too extensive a traffick.



want of a market for the produce of his industry.

Nor is this the only inconvenience that is suffered in a city, whose inhabitants are continually on the increase. For these temporary inmates must be accommodated with lodging. And hence arises that general complaint of the advance of rents, notwithstanding the additional extent of new buildings. And (such is the present rage of that self-destructive art,) there is reason to apprehend, that this overgrown metropolis must in a few years be crushed with its own weight \*. Already the head is too large for the body. The prodigious increase of inhabitants raises the price of provisions to an exorbitant height. The additional consumption is so large, that the produce of the neighbourhood is unequal to the supply †. And when the necessaries of

\* *Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.*

Horat. Epod. 16. L. 2.

† It is a great pity, (as it would be of singular service to the community,) that some of the many thousand

acres

of life are procured from a distance, they must fall into the hands of dealers and factors: who are too often led, by this temptation, to monopolies and combinations, to make their own advantage of the necessities of others.

From what source soever we derive this national distemper, we may safely venture to affirm, that it rages to that excessive degree, as is altogether unprecedented, in this our island. The present is an age of pastime, the golden reign of pleasure. We fancy we are out of the world, if we are not continually sacrificing to this great idol. The general resolution is, we will "*prove our heart with mirth* \*," "*and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant* †." We seem to have adopted in practice the false reasoning of the liber-  
 acres of waste land, which at present are only nurseries of idleness, and retreats for thieves, are not converted into small farms, and lett separately: it being generally apprehended, that one source of the present artificial scarcity is the power of feeding the market, by that shameful engrossing of farms.

\* Eccles. ii. 21.

† Is. lvi.

tine : *" Come on, let us enjoy the good things  
 " that are present, let none of us go without  
 " his part of our voluptuousness, let us leave  
 " tokens of our joyfulness in every place ; for  
 " this is our portion, and our lot is this \*."*

This frenzy is not confined only to the metropolis, but overspreads the face of the kingdom : every corner of which abounds with temples of pleasure, agreeable to the depraved taste of a luxurious age. These, at proper intervals, become the scene of public riot and dissipation, the place of general resort for the sick, and the idle, the people of fashion and fortune ; and persons of figure without any pretensions to either. It is amazing to see, how eagerly the giddy crowd are transported from all quarters to those public marts of folly and misery ! For the fashionable entertainments of the present age are the most empty and trifling that can possibly be imagined ; arguing not the want of good taste only, but even of common sense. And this must always be the consequence,  
 when-

\* Wild. ii. 6, 9.



whenever sensual pleasure is suffered to assume the empire over our rational faculties.

But, not to lose time in general declamation, give me leave to particularize an instance or two, in which modern luxury displays itself most conspicuously. And

1. In our convivial entertainments. The appetite of hunger and thirst is one of the first impulses of nature: purposely implanted in our frame, to repair the decays of the body, and to recruit and invigorate the spirits; the better to qualify us for the business of our functions. But we seem to have inverted the order of nature \*: and instead of eating and drinking to allay the pains of hunger and thirst, the whole concern of our lives is, how we may “live delicately †,” and “fare sumptuously every day ‡.” Turn our eyes which way we will, “Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine §!” It is the character of modern

\* Non ut edam vivo, sed ut vivam edo. Quint.

† Luke vii. 25. ‡ Ibid. xvi. 19. § If. xxii. 13.

epicurism to explore the treasures of sea and land \*, and traverse every quarter of the globe, in quest of new dainties to regale a luxurious palate. Our slaves to appetite vie with the delicacy and profusion of *Vitellius* † or *Heliogabalus* ‡. They are not content to eat the choicest and best, (“*the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall,*” to “*drink wine in bowls,*” (or large quantities) and “*fill themselves with costly wine*” and “*strong drink* §:”) but they adopt every mode of foreign luxury, to quicken their taste, and support the heavy entertainment of intemperance: the article of food is no longer considered as a restorative to nourish, but as  
a pro-

\* Vescendi causâ terrâ marique omnia exquirere.

Sallust. Bell. Catil.

† Luxuriæ deditus, epulas trifariam semper, interdum quadrifariam dispertiebat: in jentacula, et prandia, et cœnas, comestationesque. Famosissima super cæteras fuit cœna ei data adventitia a fratre: in quâ duo millia lectissimorum piscium, septem avium apposita traduntur. Sueton. Vita A. Vitellii. §. 13.

‡ Who would spend 1000l. sterling on one supper.

§ Wisd. ii. 7. Il. lvi. 12. Amos vi. 4, 6.

provocative to spur the lagging appetite. The present pleasure of sense is more the object of our attention, than health of body, and soundness of mind. And hence plain wholesom diets, which are the preservatives of health, are disregarded for such as are high-seasoned and inflaming; by which the mind is impaired, the body weakened, and the span of this mortal life contracted.

2. Modern dress, in all its variety of excess, and profusion of expence, is another striking instance of the luxury of the present times. The proper design of cloathing is to be a covering for shame, a fence from the injuries of the weather, and a distinction of sexes and degrees.

But we no longer consult the original intention of nature: that is altogether disregarded as out of the question; and decency, convenience, and propriety, are made to give way to pride, vanity, and caprice.

In



In the only credible account of the origin of mankind, the sacred Historian informs us, that our first parents "*were*" "*naked, and were not ashamed* \*:" but that, immediately after the fall, they "*sewed*" "*fig-leaves together, and made themselves*" "*aprons* †." From the literal interpretation of which passage it should seem, that they were kept in countenance by their native innocence; which being once forfeited, they made them cloaths to cover their nakedness. From whence it is plain, that guilt was the first occasion of shame, and shame the introduction of cloaths.

Now-a-days indeed they are worn not so much for necessity, to hide our defects, as for ostentation, for the ornament of our persons. What, in its original designation, was a mark of guilt, seems in our estimation the badge of honour. How are we debased from our original dignity, to spend our thought, time, and substance on that, which

\* Gen. ii. 25.

† Ibid. iii. 7:

which is the strongest memorial of our shame ! Can the sons of reason value themselves for the possession, or disesteem others for the want, of those trifling advantages, which can neither add nor diminish a grain of worth in the real character ?

But it is no wonder, that we so generally give into this foible, when daily experience convinces us, of what infinite use and importance this article is become in the conduct of life. It is amazing to observe, what a powerful recommendation it is to the notice, favour, and esteem of the beau monde ! Indeed it seems to be the only certain method of becoming conspicuous : and we often see persons of no merit raise themselves in the world by an impudent affectation of superiour shew and grandeur.

Cloathing being merely artificial, runs into a thousand different forms : and it often happens, that those, which are most fantastic and ridiculous, are adopted in preference

rence to such as are more useful, becoming, and convenient; being qualified to answer the purposes of life, and preserve us in health. How is the whole scope of our fancy continually on the stretch, in designing and contriving this drapery of the species! How do we travel from east to west, and ransack the several elements for materials to decorate these our corruptible bodies! To please a vitiated imagination of our own, or attract the eyes of the beholders, and provoke their envy, how content are we to forego our own ease! to go almost naked in the depth of winter, and, in the heat of summer, to pant beneath the weight of ornament! This is the reigning taste: and what will not the slaves to mode do, or suffer, in order to comply with it? But foppery in dress, though perhaps not directly criminal in itself, has always been branded as a certain indication of vanity, levity, and extravagance.

The custom of all civilized countries, hath regulated some general standard of  
 6 dress,



dress, as most convenient to discriminate one from another in point of sex, age, and quality \*. The propriety and necessity of such a regulation, is evident from the mischiefs that would ensue from the want or neglect of it. For on whatever levelling principle the reasonable distinction of merit and degree is confounded, the order of government is broken in upon and destroyed. Every one's habit ought to suit with the custom of the country, their respective sex, and station in life. "*The lively Oracles* †" represent rich men as "*cloathed in purple and fine linen ‡*," and them "*which are gorgeously appparelled to be in kings courts §*." As it would be mean and degrading for people of family and fashion to dress beneath their figure, or for those, who are advanced in years, to affect a juvenile gaiety of person: so to shew off in a degree of splendour and expence, above the rank and ability of the wearer, notwithstanding the plausible pretence of re-

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\* Bentham's Introduction to Moral Philosophy, page 71.

† Acts vii. 38. ‡ Luke xvi. 19 § Ibid. vii. 25.

commendation, is indecent, favouring of profusion and dishonesty.

For want of preserving a necessary decorum, we may observe one sex to advance in masculine assurance, as the other sinks into unmanly delicacy. And while these effeminate fribbles will hardly "*adventure*" *to set the sole of their feet on the ground* "*for delicateness and tenderness*", our female cavaliers have well nigh lost that graceful modesty and decent reserve, which have always been justly admired as the characteristic of the sex.

In well-ordered communities, the wisdom of the legislature has sometimes restrained this species of luxury by the penal severity of sumptuary laws. And as if the opposition of reason was not a sufficient check upon this vanity, religion has likewise interposed her authority. *Isaiab* †, with all the elegance of description, exposes the haughty looks, wanton eyes, and  
enticing

\* Deut. xxviii. 56.

† If. iii. 16.

enticing mien of the women of those times. And the apostles have taken great pains to recommend "*modest apparel with shamefacedness and sobriety,*" at the same time that they condemn "*that outward adorning of (broidering or) plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or pearls, or costly array* \*."

These scriptural remarks against pride in apparel, though levelled at the female world, may be applied with equal force against this foible in our sex. If we would lop off all the luxuriances of dress, we must root out of the heart the very seeds of vanity. Then should we not be so solicitous in setting off our persons, as to neglect the embellishment of the inner man with the rich attire of good works: we should study to decorate the mind with all those shining qualities, which make us illustrious in ourselves, and serviceable to others; and thereby most effectually repair that shame, which the external adorning of the body is

D 2

purposely

\* 1 Tim. ii. 9. 1 Pet. iii. 3.



purposely contrived to cover, but, when carried to excess, serves the more glaringly to expose.

3. An immoderate display of splendour and expence is conspicuous in our domestic structures, where convenience and comfort generally give way to vanity and prodigality. It were at least a pardonable foible for people of fashion and fortune to occupy, or even to raise, sumptuous edifices suitable to their rank and abilities. Whereas an affectation of similar magnificence in those of inferiour fortune would be preposterous and inexcusable. And yet every day's experience furnishes melancholy instances of this madness of the people, who, for want of "*counting the cost, begin to build, and are not able to finish* \*."

4. Our furniture is still more sumptuous and superb than our houses: consisting of massy plate, ornamental china, rich tapestry, costly paintings, curious sculpture, and other fashion-

\* Luke xiv. 28, 30.

fashionable articles of expence; each of which, separately considered, would amount to a moderate fortune. Almost every one sets up for a virtuoso, or man of taste in the polite arts; boasts his collection of curiosities and, as a specimen of his superiour discernment, will purchase an antique, a bad copy, or a broken statue, at ten times its value. The supreme pride of the possessor is to raise the admiration, or envy, of the spectator in every article of expensive elegance, or rather whimsical folly.

5. From the same motive we endeavour to outshine each other in the splendour of our equipages, and the largeness of our retinue: which we carefully glean from every quarter of the globe, and import in such shoals, that the nation bids fair for becoming, in a few years, a motley breed of foreigners and mulattoes.

6. We run into the like excess of riot in our amusements and diversions. One of the most agreeable entertainments of life, and capable

pable of raising in us a variety of sublime pleasures, is the divine art of music : which no doubt a wise and kind Providence communicated to cheer and enliven our spirits, after the fatigue of incessant labour, or intense study. Yet how is this noble gift perverted in its use, and debased from its original design !

The sacred history of the *Jews* represents some of them “ *chaunting to the sound of the viol, and inventing to themselves instruments of music, like David \** :” employing, though they were but private persons, as great a variety for their own diversion, as the king did in the service of his Maker. How far this character is expressive of the present humour, a little reflection may serve to determine.

Music is one of the leading entertainments now in vogue; an object of general attention, engrossing the time and conversation of some, as much as it exercises the labour and invention of others. The enchanting pleasures of sound steal gently over the ravished ear,

\* Amos vi. 5.



ear, and sense runs away with reason. For that, which was wont to be the entertainment of an evening, is now become the employment of our morning hours.

And how shall I declare, or how will the sober part of the world believe, that it now makes a part of our Sunday night's devotion? However we may endeavour to satisfy ourselves of the innocence of this custom, with the specious pretence of performing nothing but sacred music: it is undoubtedly criminal, if it becomes "*a stumbling-block,*" "*or an occasion to fall in the way of a weak brother* \*." And there are many people, who know how to relax the tone of application in their own way: but being unbred, and strait-laced in their notions, are at a loss to reconcile this new improvement to their old-fashioned ideas of the business of a sabbath.

However, should our taste for harmony and air still continue to improve, as it has for some years past, it will become a matter of

\* Rom. xiv. 13.

of serious consideration, whether this art, which was designed to sweeten our disposition, and humanize its natural ferocity ; to rouse the nobler passions of the soul, and inspire every thing that is great and excellent ; may not in time cause our national spirit wholly to evaporate.

It is certain, that our national wisdom is impeached, while we encourage any excellence in a polite art in such a manner, as is really alarming \*. For hereby we seem to establish this paradox, that pleasure, if it is not the best business, is at least preferable to honest industry. Allow every foreigner in the kingdom their several degrees of merit, but do not over-rate it, to the disparagement, or neglect, of our own countrymen :  
for

\* It is generally believed, that a celebrated Italian singer, besides a stipend of 1500l. for the season, cleared, by his benefit, 1000l. more. What a comfortable relief would such a sum have afforded to numbers of our own native performers ? Who have had their excellencies, but are now disabled from getting a livelihood by their age, by the profession being overstocked by younger artists, by foreign imports, &c. Oh luxury ! Alas ! patriotism !

for if you do, you deservedly become the object of their insolence and ridicule.

7. There are other rational entertainments, which might be made a perpetual source of innocent amusement, if not of useful instruction: but for want of a proper direction, become the channel of folly and impertinence. Friendly visits for conversation are grown antiquated, and insipid. The pink of the present mode, the quintessence of all enjoyment, is tasteless riot, and tumultuous assemblies. People hardly known to each other are brought together by the same epidemical rage, the love of play. This is the peculiar scandal of the present age, the pernicious custom, which engrosses most of our time and thoughts. For it can never be right to make that a business, which should be only a recreation, or whet to employment: because it would interfere with that prudential care, which every man ought to take, for the discharge of his respective capacity in the offices of life.

E

Gaming



Gaming is a fever, which seldom intermits; the week of those, who follow it, has no sabbath. With too many it is become a calling, and that a very laborious one: since they toil at it night and day, hardly allowing themselves that relaxation, which the laws of God and man have provided. I am sorry to say, that playing cards on Sundays is too notorious a practice among the people of fashion: people, who pique themselves on their good sense, and taste for politeness; though they have no other authority, but their own infamous examples, to countenance such an outrageous insult to Heaven, and their country.

However unwilling we are to avow so fordid a motive as avarice, we shall find it difficult to resolve this unaccountable folly into any thing else. What, but the insatiable “*greediness of filthy lucre* \*,” could tempt a man to risque the losing of his own possessions for the uncertain hazard of gaining another’s? This is the delightful prof-

\* 1 Tim. iii. 3.

pect, in which the whole man is absorbed, and, instead of being palled with satiety, derives new vigour from enjoyment.

For this we confound the distinctions of age and sex, forego the advantages of birth and education, pass anxious days and wakeful nights, deny ourselves the benefit of light and air, and sacrifice everything that is dear to the dearer diversion. It is really astonishing to see people of the best sense, well qualified for the mutual pleasures of social converse, agreeing to banish thought, suspend the faculties of reason, and bury the noblest accomplishments in a stupid attention to the most trifling employment ! What pains do we take to consume in indolence and vanity that inestimable talent, our time, which we are so earnestly exhorted to husband and redeem ?

Mean while the mind is agitated with a continual conflict of the lowest passions, ebbing and flowing with our success : breaking out into unseemly transports at a lucky hit, and,

on a reverse of fortune, depriving us of all command of ourselves.

These are the effects of this scandalous custom, which prevails so universally in the fashionable world: notwithstanding it is the grossest impiety to the Majesty of Heaven, contrary to the tenour of our most holy religion, and inconsistent with the interests of civil government. For it tempts men to swear, lye, cheat, rob, quarrel, fight, and even to murder one another. It destroys the sweetest temper, ruins the best constitution, hurts our fortune, and injures our family.

But it is time to say something of the effects of luxury in general. And what can possibly be more pernicious in its tendency, than this reigning passion for pleasure: which renders us contemptible in private life, and unfit to be trusted in public? For it disposes us to a general neglect of the several duties, which we owe to ourselves, our family, our country, and our God.

Man



Man may be considered in a natural, social, and religious light : designed, as an individual, to pursue his own interest ; to contribute to the good of others, as a part of a family, or member of civil society ; and, as a moral agent, tied down to a particular course of action. In which soever point of view we consider him, we cannot but observe the fatal consequences of this malignant vice.

In a religious capacity nothing can be more unbecoming, and improper for the circumstances of our being. In this probationary state we are engaged in a continual warfare, in which we "*strive for the mastery :*" and therefore are expected to be "*temperate in all things,*" to be able to "*endure hardness \**," and to stand on the defensive. If, on the other hand, we are untrained, and off our guard ; if, moreover, we are in league with our spiritual opponents ; and, like faithful confederates, strengthen their party with a fresh supply of

\* 1 Cor. ix. 25. 2 Tim. ii. 3.

forces: how can we avoid the danger of being foiled, and falling an easy prey to their assaults?

It is hardly possible, but that the noblest virtues should lie dormant and neglected, in the attentive pursuits of pleasure\*. While we are so wholly taken up with it, we have neither the power, nor inclination, to improve ourselves in those moral attainments, which are the only valuable ornament of the rational nature.

It may well be questioned, whether pleasure is not the seminary, that gives birth and increase to every folly and vice, that debases the dignity of the species. For, in proportion as luxury abounds in any country, its consequent, irreligion, is generally observed to gain ground. To support the truth of this assertion, we need only observe, to what an exceeding low ebb vital religion is reduced in these kingdoms.

\* *Maximas virtutes jacere omnes necesse est, voluptate dominante.* Cicero de fin.

When

When once the active principle is lost in the sink of sensual pleasure, easy is the declension to a general dissolution of manners. In every age of the world vice has been the just subject of invective : but luxury renders the commission of it more frequent and extensive, engaging in the habitual practice of crimes the most inconsistent with the being of religion \*.

If we view man in the separate character of an individual, we find that pleasure, which, taken in moderation, is the life of soul and body, is of the worst consequence to both, when followed to excess. For nothing can be more injurious to the body, impairing its strength, and shortening the term of its duration. Health is the natural riches of life, a necessary ingredient, that gives a relish to every enjoyment : and temperance and exercise are the basis, on which depend the vigour both of body and mind.

\* To this we are indebted for the villainous combinations of stock-jobbers, gamesters, sharpers, pick-pockets, highwaymen, murderers, &c. &c.

They,



They, who are the most moderate and regular, are, generally speaking, the most healthful and strong: to cultivate and improve the powers of the mind, being the surest step to arrive at the true enjoyment of the body. Whereas the mad sons of pleasure are usually infirm and distempered, subject to acute pains, and immature death. Hence it becomes easy to account for the present change in our animal œconomy: where the rosy cheek of health is bartered for the wan complexion of sickness; and the robust and hardy generation of ancient *Britons*, is dwindled into a degenerated and puny race of emasculated invalids. It is amazing to observe, what havock and destruction is made in the constitution by pride and effeminacy, riot and intemperance! It signifies little, whether by the extreme of luxurious indolence, or a perpetual restlessness of motion, we are beguiled of health, or run ourselves out of life. Is it not an unaccountable folly, to court those pleasures, which insure present pain, and entail lasting misery? Must not every man in his senses think that purchase  
excessively

excessively dear, which is made with the price of his health, and perhaps his life?

In like manner luxury injures and destroys our mental, as well as corporeal, powers. So intimate is the connexion between the body and soul, that whatever disorders and weakens the one, proportionably affects the operations of the other. Luxury impairs the faculties of the soul, clouds the understanding, renders the will listless and inactive, stupefies the judgment, blunts the edge of our spirits; in short, for a time divests us of reason, and deprives us of all force of acting consistently with the dignity of reasonable creatures.

It should seem, we run in the sternal circle of vanity more for the anxious pains which it suspends, than for any real pleasure of which it is productive. For, when ever diversion becomes our capital business, the main study and pursuit of life, it disappoints itself, and ceases to be diversion. But, in the tedious intervals of indifference, we soon grow tired of ourselves and our own thoughts:

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and

and hence, in quest of a refuge, we are continually shifting the scene from morning to night, and from night to morning again.

When the unreserved gratification of sense becomes the sole object of attention, the mind must be in a constant hurry and dissipation. In the room of calm reason, and cool reflection, is substituted a general impatience of thought: whereby we are indisposed for all rational exercises and improvements; incapacitated for severe, or even serious, employments; and deprest from atchieving, or so much as attempting any thing great and good.

Luxury is the bane of private property, as it tends to the prejudice of our fortune, and the injury of our family. As industry and frugality are a kind of natural wealth, so is luxury of artificial poverty. For it sets off with that madness of career, as hardly any thing is sufficient to controul, but the real want of ability to proceed. It banishes all thoughts of private oeconomy, professing the least regard for that, of which it has the  
greatest



greatest occasion. It is the part of wisdom to regulate our expences with discretion: but to spare in nothing is not only a ridiculous, but dangerous, folly.

It requires not the spirit of prophecy to foresee, what must be the effects of riot and extravagance. Let a man's fortune be what it will, he will quickly dissipate it, and be reduced to great extremities, if he suffers himself to be made the dupe of every sharper, or with heedless profusion squanders his wealth on every expensive folly that starts into vogue. 'The natural consequence of prodigality is a fall into all the evils of poverty and vileness \*.' Hence it often happens, that they, who once "*had enough and to spare* †," are "*brought to a piece of bread* ‡:" "*they, that did feed delicately, are desolate in the streets; they, that were brought up in scarlet, embrace dung-hills* §."

The man, who comes to want by living beyond his fortune, falls unpitied, though not unreprieved. Envy, which was dumb during

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\* Bentham p. 52. † Luke xv. 17. ‡ Prov. vi. 26.

§ Lam. iv. 5.

his former height, dares, on his fall, to open with all the insolence, and keenness of reproach. And his present misfortunes receive an additional sting from the conscious reflection of his past prosperity, and that, whilst he was "*wasting his substance with riotous living\**," he was lavishing away what should maintain himself and support his family.

And this is not only an act of ingratitude to those, to whose care and prudence he is indebted for the acquisitions with which he is entrusted, but also a great injustice to his posterity. For hereby many a good family has been impoverished and ruined: many an heir apparent to an handsome patrimony has been obliged to "*seek his bread out of desolate places †.*"

The inordinate love of pleasure is able to dissolve the most sacred ties, even of blood and affinity, to silence the calls of natural affection, and drive from the parents heart all concern to provide for their issue. Many a man of fortune, rather than not gratify

\* Luke xv. 13.      † Ps. cix. 10.

gratify his predominant passion for pleasure, is content to become a beggar himself, to leave his unhappy descendants a rent-roll, charged with mortgages and incumbrances, and, instead of that affluence, which their birth teaches them to expect, entail beggary and disgrace on children yet unborn.

Luxury is an injustice to the poor, defrauding them of that portion, which reason and religion give them a right to expect.

It is apt to assume the pleasing garb of benevolence and generosity, pretending to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. But experience abundantly confirms the truth of a very different observation made in the sacred history. Where it is said of the luxurious inhabitants of *Sion*, "*They were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph* \*:" they wanted compassion for their poor brethren, or countrymen, in distress. And the Gospel furnishes a more recent instance of voluptuousness and unmercifulness in "*a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and*  
*" fine*

\* Amos vi. 6.



*" fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day :*" who nevertheless is represented as disregarding, or at least not relieving, *" A beggar full of sores, that was daily laid at his gate \*."*

I believe, few men of pleasure set out on a premeditated scheme, of doing as much good as they can to others. Luxury not only deprives us of the power, but even checks the inclination, to do good. Wherever it prevails, the social ties of friendship, charity, and hospitality are at an end. The *" still small voice †"* of humanity is overpowered in the loud clamours of intemperate pleasure. The impetuous cravings of depraved appetites, prevent the delicate sensations of tenderness and compassion.

But if an infinitely wise and benevolent Being designed that all His creatures should find a comfortable subsistence in this world : we can never suppose, that the unequal distribution of the good things of life, was meant as a provision for the riot of some, or to expose others to all the evils of poverty and want.

\* Luke xvi. 19, 20      † 1 Kings xix. 12.

want. They, who have received the means of happiness with a bountiful hand, are expected to testify their grateful sense of the favour, by a liberal communication to the necessities of the indigent. When therefore we lavish on our own vanity, what was intended for the relief and comfort of others: we abuse the goodness, and run counter to the will, of our gracious Benefactor.

Luxury is prejudicial to trade, and undermines the very foundation, on which our political fabric depends. It has been asserted in behalf of this vice, that it is the patroness of trade, the means of its encouragement and support. And indeed this argument would be urged with some degree of plausibility, if it could once be proved, that the articles of luxury were either our own native produce, or more honestly paid for. But this seems too much for us to expect in the present situation of things.

The observation of the moralist is extremely just: ' that more men suffer by the prodigal's profuseness, than are benefited by it ;  
' and

‘and they commonly are the most benefited,  
 ‘who least deserve it\*.’ For, however fashionable it is grown to discharge debts of honour with a religious punctuality, moral honesty was hardly ever at a lower ebb. If our expences out-run our abilities, or, to support our vanity, we contract such exorbitant debts, as we are either not willing, or not able, to pay : I do not see how we can reconcile it with common honesty. It is by such servile meannesses, and flagrant injustice, many an honest man is kept out, or defrauded, of his just right, and thereby distressed and ruined. Hence our public papers are filled with bankrupts, and our prisons with felons.

Our luxury might be less unpardonable, if the only good effects of it were suffered to circulate among ourselves. But the materials of our splendour and profusion are, for the most part, exotic : nothing, that is the produce of our own climate, is barely supportable. So strong is our attachment to that nation in particular, who has infected the world with her fantastic levity : that

\* Benth. p. 52.



people of taste can hardly eat, drink, wear, or endure, any thing, that is not imported from that dear country. What a strange infatuation! that we should be at so great pains and expence to feed our natural rivals in trade, and sworn enemies to the welfare of our country! To what purpose serves the enacting of laws, to restrain men from giving into so pernicious a custom: if they, who are bound by the strongest ties to enforce their observance, are generally the first who violate, and countenance the violation of, them. It would be difficult to devise a restraint for those, who have no sense of honour or duty, no regard for the good of their own country. While this our land is drained and impoverished by the importation of foreign superfluities, so that "*The merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of our delicacies* \* : our own trade is at a stand, and many an useful hand is lost to the community, being suffered to rot at home, or forced to seek employment in an hostile land.

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\* Rev. xviii. 3.

Nor is it the trading part only, but the whole nation, that is affected by the universal prevalence of luxury. The opulence of the state is not owing to our home consumption so much, as to our trade of exports. Now the extent of foreign commerce must always depend on the mean price of the commodities, which are sent to market. The price of a commodity will ever be regulated by the price of labour : he, that can work cheapest, will of course be able to sell cheapest. The price of labour will be in proportion to the price of the necessaries of life, and the expence we are at in the mode of subsistence. For if the manufacturer purchases necessaries at an enhanced price, or, in compliance with a vicious taste, cannot live without superfluities : he must naturally expect a better price for his commodities than he, who can subsist in a more frugal manner, and consequently can afford to work cheaper.

And this no doubt is one reason, that some branches of our trade are already  
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fallen into decay, and others are in danger from the rivalry of our neighbours. Our artizans in general are got into a very expensive way of living: taxes run high, and all the necessaries of life are sold at a most enormous exaction; whereby the people in general, but especially the industrious poor, are great sufferers. Now, if from such causes the produce of our labour becomes dearer, it will be more difficult to find a market for it. Commerce gains strength, and extends itself, in proportion to the discoveries and improvements, that are daily made, in the hidden works of nature. Other nations are undermining us in our trade, and artfully endeavouring to supplant us in our most staple commodities: and even our *American* colonies, (which have been settled at so prodigious an expence of blood and treasure,) are making large strides towards a state of independence on the mother country. The wealth and prosperity of the nation depends on foreign markets: if they fail, the landlord must go without his rent, and the tenant without his employ. So that, those very rules of good husbandry,



which at present all our wisdom and sagacity cannot persuade us to think requisite to our well being, we may in time be compelled to practise through dint of necessity.

Luxury eradicates all those patriotic affections, which should be the highest ambition, as they are the chief ornament, of the social nature. Where a love of one's country animates the bosom, numberless are the objects, on which this comprehensive principle may exert itself. As, in countenancing and rewarding the good; rebuking and punishing the bad; patronizing men of genius, whether they distinguish themselves in the *belles lettres*, or excell in the polite arts; promoting trade, and supporting our own manufactures; reducing the exorbitant price of provisions; employing the poor in virtuous industry; providing for the widow and orphan, the aged, the blind, and the lame; particularly for our soldiers and sailors, who so lately signalized themselves in defence of their country; encouraging population, making matrimony easy to the poor, checking the progress of prostitution, discouraging the

the emigration of natives ; saving the forfeited lives of criminals.

These and the like employments are much nobler objects of emulation, than who shall appear foremost in every article of expensive pleasure. But the misfortune is, that, wherever luxury gains the ascendant, it is hardly possible that public virtue should subsist. Our national effeminacy seems to have extinguished our national spirit. It must be owned, that want of charity is by no means the characteristic of the present times, however deficient we are in other instances of public spirit. But the general inattention, and disregard to, real merit, must prove a great check to the exertion of valour, genius, and abilities of every kind. For who will care to risque his life, or lay himself out, in the service of his country, whilst interest alone carries all before it, and preferment is given to the undeserving, or exposed to public sale, and made the property of the highest bidder?

Luxury makes men selfish, oppressive, and riotous. The greatest enemy to patriotism

otism is too attentive a regard to our own interest. And, where the inordinate love of pleasure predominates, selfishness is generally a governing principle. With the present gratification of sense, the man of pleasure thinks no consideration can come in competition. Hence he is determined to get the means of enjoyment into his power, though it were at the expence of every thing that is dear and sacred : sacrifices all regard for the general welfare to narrow views of his own private interest, and even sells his country to enrich and aggrandize himself.

As great a paradox as it may seem, that two vices, so diametrically oppositè, as luxury and avarice, should at the same time take possession of any one man : yet we often see them become one complex principle of action, and the same heart, which is wholly set upon pleasure, no less enslaved to the tyrannical power of insatiable desires \*. Of the truth of this observation there is a remarkable confirmation in a *Roman*

\* *Perf. Sat. V. 132, &c.*



*man* historian of good credit \*, who represents the hero of his narration † rapacious and craving after other men's possessions, at the same time that he was lavish in squandering his own patrimony ‡. And the same author remarks, that, in his time, when the common-wealth of *Rome* was in the meridian of its glory, having subdued the most formidable states of the world: they sunk into those two evils of a different nature, a general corruption of principle, and an inordinate pruriency of desire §.

When a people are lulled in the calm of prosperity, and ease, they naturally fall into an emulous competition in every mode of luxurious gratification. The love of pleasure begets a love of money: and greedy rapaciousness attends a careless prodigality. Distress of circumstances is generally the consequence of dissolute riot, and heedless

\* Sallust. † Catiline

‡ Alieni appetens, sui profusus. Bell. Catil.

§ Incitabant præterea corrupti civitatis mores, quos pessima ac diversa inter se mala, luxuria atque avaritia, vexabant. Ibid.

less dissipation. Luxury is expensive, and the sons of pleasure are not always the best proficient in œconomy. Bent upon present gratification, they are unable to brook the want of the means, and therefore readily embrace any feasible project to procure them \*.

Hence it is that luxury paves the way to injustice, as well as avarice. They, who are intent upon pleasure, are intent upon the ways of a supply. To keep on in the mad career, the reduced finances must have a fresh recruit by some means. In order to raise it, and secure the continuance of their enjoyments, they abandon themselves to all the meanness of a contracted spirit, sticking at no baseness whatsoever: but, if their rank in life protects them, engage in overt acts of outrage and oppression, or stoop to the pitiful shifts of thievery and sharping.

On

\* Hæc ——— juvenutem, ubi familiares opes defecerant, ad facinora incendebant. Animus imbutus malis artibus, haud facile lubidinibus carebat: eo profusus omnibus modis questui atque sumptui deditus. Ibid.

On the same principles they are ready to run into all those evils, which tend to the interruption of the public peace, and the subversion of government. To the praise of luxury, it has been said, that it is necessary to prevent the dissensions of the opulent, by giving them opportunities of squandering their substance in every fashionable instance of folly and vice. But I dare appeal to the common sense of mankind, whether men of desperate fortunes, who have nothing to lose, and may hope to find their account in fishing in troubled waters, are not much more likely to engage in hazardous enterprises, form parties, and link in conspiracies\*, than men in easy circumstances, who have much to lose, and nothing to hope from any change or revolution; who, we may reasonably presume, will upon that account be less eager to run any risque of that ruin, which is the usual conse-

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\*Agitabatur magis magisque indies (Catilinæ) animus ferox inopiâ rei familiaris. Ibid.



quence of popular factions and turbulent seditions.

Luxury is the natural parent of indolence, pusillanimity, and effeminacy, which it introduces and diffuses over the whole moral world. It unnerves the whole system of the human fabric, and breaks the force of our several powers, both of body and mind; enfeebling the strength and hardiness of the one, and enervating the vigour and activity of the other. So powerful is the influence of its blandishments, that it works the strangest alterations in our nature: softens the rough, makes cowards of the brave, renders the active indolent, and the industrious idle. It corrupts and debases the heart: makes us dilatory, irresolute, and remiss, in the discharge of our respective employments. So that, if it polishes our nature, refines our taste, and improves our delicacy: it tends to the decay of good sense, sound literature, and useful arts.

*Campania*

*Campania* \* was as fatal to the *Carthaginians*, as *Cannæ* † had been to the *Romans*. For, during their winter quarters in that delicious country, their courage was more broke, than by the rugged passes of the *Alps* or *Pyrenees*, or the utmost efforts of *Roman* prowess. And *Capua* ‡ unarmed, but with her *Circæan* enchantments, turned *Hannibal's* triumphs into disgrace, and sullied the glory of sixteen years successes.

There was a time, when the people of this country were the dread and envy of the nations around: but how are we degenerated from our fore-fathers! It is true, that martial fire, which inspired their patriot breasts, may not be wholly extinguished: some few sparks of it may be still concealed

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\* A champaign country in the kingdom of *Naples*, accounted the most fruitful and pleasant in *Italy*.

† A pitiful village in *Apulia*, made famous by a great overthrow which *Hannibal* gave the *Romans* there, killing about 40,000 men; and among them such a number of gentry, that he sent to *Carthage* three bushels of rings, as a testimony of the victory. Liv.

xxii. 47. Flor. ii. 6.

‡ A city of *Naples*.

in the dying embers. But should we continue to repose ourselves in the soft bed of effeminacy, who knows what may be the consequence? *Hessians* and *Hanoverians* may not be able to defend us against foreign invasions: we may be afraid to look an enemy in the face, or meanly sue for peace in the midst of conquests.

Luxury is an intestine foe: a kind of venomous reptile, which we fondle and cherish in our bosom, till it sting us to the heart. The prevalence of this vice is ominous to the constitution: imperceptibly undermining its very foundation, till the tottering fabric sinks at once into a total dissolution. If we look into the annals of antiquity, we find that it has been the ruin of many a kingdom. By this *Greece* itself, the seat of learning and politeness, the soft *Athenians*, and rough *Spartans*, and all the free states of antiquity, were overthrown. At length the contagion, spreading gradually over *Italy*, infected *Rome* itself. That renowned republic, which by virtue, temperance,



rance, and frugality, had so long asserted the empire of the world, fell an inglorious victim to luxury. And, from that time to this, it has never been able to emerge from a settled depravation, but still continues wretched on the principles of its original enslavement.

The best contrived political fabric is not proof against the power of so dangerous an assailant. Though it is no easy task to fetter reasonable beings, till such time as their rationality is exhaled in the fumes of evaporating pleasure : yet then, like our fellow brutes, we shall tamely bend our necks to the proffered yoke, and hug the chains that deprive us of our liberty. All the while we are revelling in luxury, we are forging for ourselves the shackles of slavery. Even now we are ready to become the vassals of any master, who will come up to our price. We please ourselves with the fond conceit of being a free-born people : but, with all our boasted privileges, what have we remaining but the shadow

shadow of freedom ? A liberty to sell ourselves, and entrust our rights and properties with such, as are unable to maintain their own. It is to be feared, that, when a boundless thirst of power becomes the object of general pursuit, and the attention is wholly engrossed in the acquisition and defence of it : it is more with a view of a supply for our necessities, and to feed our luxury, than from a laudable ambition of doing our country service.

Liberty is a fluctuating precarious possession, but is never in greater danger of being lost, than when it is made a transferable commodity, a subject of barter between guardians and people. The basis of true liberty, the very band of civil society, is moral virtue. Whatever corrupts our principles, and debauches our morals, whatever renders us necessitous and mercenary, is a sure presage of our declension to ruin. The natural parent of necessity is luxury, venality is the issue of necessity, and slavery the offspring of venality.

When

When the nation has been drained with a long and expensive war, when taxes are high, our poor numerous, and necessaries exorbitantly dear : is it a time to think of nothing but pleasure ? Is it consistent with national policy, wholly to devote ourselves to riot in all the wantonness of mirth and gaiety, profusion and extravagance ? Whoever has the least spark of self-love or public spirit, cannot but see and lament, that luxury, which has always been in high vogue, as a capital ingredient of happiness, is at this time a crying sin of this land. It is hardly possible at once to stem a torrent, which with a rapid impetuosity sweeps all before it. When the body politic is sick with a complication of disorders : the recovery of its former health is not the work of a moment. But, if we have any regard for the liberty, peace, and prosperity, of our country ; if we wish *to keep ourselves unspotted from the follies and vices of the world* \* ; to improve in the habits of virtue ; and to enjoy lasting vigour of body and mind :

\* Jam. i. 27.



mind ; it behoves every one of us, in our respective stations and capacities, to lend an helping hand to the salutary work of checking the progress of this growing evil, and striking at its very root ; by restraining our natural appetite for pleasure within the bounds of reason and religion, and not suffering ourselves to be driven with the current of so corrupt a custom, but learning the value and true use of money, and proportioning our expences to our income ; that, like grateful children, and faithful subjects, we may enjoy our portion with moderation, temperance, and frugality, and “ *may have to give to him that needeth* \*.”

\* Ephes. iv. 28.



F I N I S.

